A Rare Syncretic Image of Harihararka from Tilkesvaragarh, District Darbhanga, Bihar

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Abstract: *Visnu, Siva and Surya are the principal deities of Brahmanical pantheon. They are worshipped individually as well as syncretic forms and they have their own cults also. The syncretic image of Visnu Siva and Surya may be termed as Harihararka and this composite form emphasizes the reconciliation among the three major cults of Vaisnava, Saiva and Saura. Images of Harihararka in Indian art are extremely rare. Recently an image of Hariharaka has been noticed by the author in Chandradhari Museum which is wrongly identified as Visnu or Surya. The image under discussion has great iconographical significance which proves the innovative skills of sculptor and communal harmony in the Bihar region. It is also helpful to understand the development of Brahmanical syncretic art in the Bihar. It is the only known specimen of Harihararka in eastern India and in Pala art.*

Keywords: Tilkesvargarh, Harihara, Harihararka, Syncretic,Surya-Narayana, Dhatra Surya, Martanda Bhairava

Introduction

Surya enjoys an important status from the remote past. He is not only considered as the chief of entire solar system and *navagrahas* but also responsible for all seasons, light, heat, food, vegetation and whatever are the required for the existence of human beings. For these qualities Surya is compared and shows the close association of Brahamanical triad; Brahma (creator), Visnu (preservator) and Mahesh (destroyer) in various Puranas. According to Skanda Purana, Sun god is Brahma, Visnu and Siva, all combined (Nagar 1995: 198). Bhavisya Purana states that Surya god is supreme god and combines him with the Brahamanical triad (Nagar 1995: 199). Markandeya Purana tells us that the body of sun god is the same as the bodies of Brahma, Visnu and Siva, the real nature of his resplendent body consists of these three aspects. Sarada Tilaktantra(141.41-42) also proves the closeness of Surya with triad .

The same ideology was translated by the Indian artists in plastic art and various syncretic forms of Surya were created in early medieval period. The syncretic form of Surya and Visnu is known as Surya Narayana, similarly form of Surya and Siva is known as Rudra-Bhaskara or Martanda-Bhairava, Surya and Brahma is called as

Dhatra Surya. Composite form of Surya, Visnu, Siva and Brahma is mentioned as Hari-Hara-Hiryana garbha. Such type of images are reported from various parts of India,. Pala art which was flourished from 8th cen. AD in Bihar and Bengal under the region of Pala dynasty is noted for artistic genius including syncretic sun sculptures of the then sculptors.

Among them two Surya Narayana sculptures from Chandimau, district Nalanda (Tiwari 2004:257-59), Martanda Bhaivava from Manda, Rajshahi (Nagar 1995: 200), Surya-Brahma sculpture from Mahendra, Dinajpur (Banerjea 2016: 550) are noteworthy.

Sometimes individual images of deities were carved in group showing the religious tolerance and syncretism. Among them Hari-Hara-Surya-Buddha carved on a slab, which is found in Bihar and displayed in Indian museum Kolkata is noteworthy. Surya is also carved with Visnu, Ganesha, Shakti and Siva around the Sivalinga, such type of specimen also found in Bihar and two of them reported from Patna and one is displayed in Indian Museum. Recently a stone image of Surya datable to Pala period noticed at Tikari, district Gaya of Bihar with the depiction of Tara and Buddha (Dwivedi 2013:243-247).

The images of Harihararka (syncretic form of Surya- Visnu and Siva) are extremely rare in Indian art. In this context an interesting six armed syncretic image found from Madhia (Panna, M.P.). The deity is holding trident and lotus in two left hands while third shows the *varada* pose. The two right hands carry lotus and deer symbol (*mrganka*) and third arm is broken. The deity is wearing boots. Hiralal (Hiralal 1918: 137) wrongly identified the image as Trimurti (syncretic image of Brahma, Visnu and Siva). Interestingly Nandi and Garuda are carved on either side of the deity. Some scholars identified it as syncretic image of Siva and Surya on the basis of attributes. J.N. Banejea(2016: 549) rightly pointed out that it is the combined form of Surya Siva and Visnu.

Another sculpture of Harihararka has been found at Lakshmi Narayan temple Pedgaon, Maharastra (Welankar 2009: 320). The six armed deity holding full blown lotus in the lower most pair of hands, the upper most pair of hands he is holding trident and snake but the middle pair of hands are broken. Deity is flanked by *Chakrapurusha* and *Sankhapurusha.* The iconographic texts are silent about the Harihararka syncretic form but such type of representation in plastic art may be the outcome of artistic imagination of artists as well as requirements of the then religious society.

As stated earlier, images of Harihararka are very rare in Indian context. Recently an image of Harihararka noticed by the author in the Chandradhari Museum, Darbhanga (Figure 1) which has been found from Tilkesvaragarh, which has been wrongly identified as Visnu and presently labeled as Surya.

Tilkesvara village is situated in block Kusheswar Asthan East in Darbhanga district of Bihar state. It is located 70 km south east from Darbhanga, 10 km North-east from Kusheswar Asthan East or 147 km North East from Patna. Garh is generally denoted traditionally as ancient mound in Bihar. There is a modern Siva temple named Tilkesvaranath temple built upon slightly elevated mound and it is believed to be an ancient temple of the region. Remains of ancient architectural members and sculptures still may be seen on the site. A fair is also organized on the occasion of *Mahasivaratri* and *srawan* month dedicated to Siva, every year. Most probably this modern temple constructed on the spot of ancient temple. An inscription also found from Tilkesvara (Mishra 1979: 196).

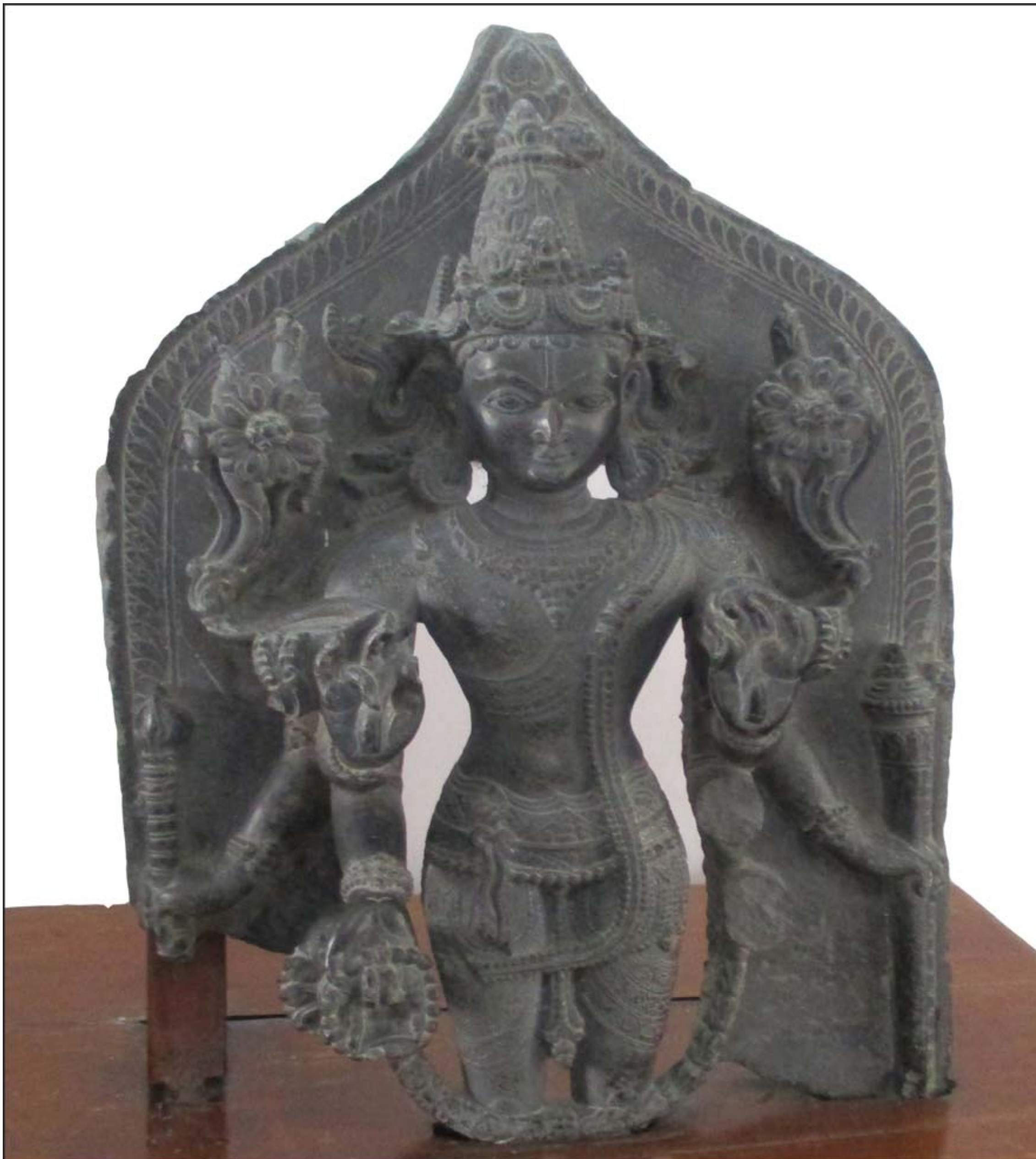


Figure 1: Harihararka, Black Basalt, 11th Century AD, Chandradhari Museum

The image under discussion was also found from Tilkesvaragarh and is displayed in Chandradheri Museum, Darbhanga. The sculpture has been referred to as Visnu in Hindi guide book published by the said museum (Roy 2000:63) but presently it has been labeled as Surya. Although various scholars visited the museum surprisingly this image has not been properly identified by any one.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the present paper is to discuss the iconographic features and uniqueness of this syncretic image. It is also a fact that a good number of Pala- late Pala (Karnata) sculptures have been found and discovered from North Bihar but most of them have not been properly studied or published.

In this sculpture, asingle headed and six armed deity is shown standing in *samabhanga sthanaka* pose. He is decked with high *kirita mukuta, chakra, kundala, kanthahara, angad, kada* and stylistically arranged *vanamala*, transparent *uttariya* and *dhoti* with floral design. He is holding full blown stalks of lotus in upper pair of hands, *trisula* in middle right hand and *akshamala* in lower right hand. Similarly he is holding *gada* in middle left hand, the remaining lower left hand is broken, which must have had an attribute of Visnu. Thus lotuses in upper pair of hands are indicative of Surya while trident and rosary in other two right hands match with the Siva and *gada* in middle left hand and long *vanamala* represent the Visnu character. Thus the image is a representation of syncretic form of three principal gods i.e. Surya, Siva and Visnu. Apex of back slab is semi circular with elongated pointed top. The edge of back slab is decorated with the row of flower petals. The *kirtimukha* was carved on the top of back slab. The sculpture is hewn out of black basalt and it measures53 cm high, 37 cms width and 13 cms thickness. On the stylistic ground it may be datable to 11^{th} century A.D.

Interestingly attributes of Siva and Visnu match with a Harihar sculpture of Chalukyan period (Rao 1971: 336) where Harihara holds trident in right upper, rosary in right lower hands represent Savaite emblem and mace in upper left and lower is broken (perhaps *sankha*), represent Vaisnava emblem.

The above survey would clearly show that the syncretic image of Harihararka or Harihara-Surya from Tilkesvaragarh is the only known example from Bihar and belonging to the Pala art. Thus this image has great iconographical significance. It is a welcome addition to the galaxy of creative artistic manifestations of syncretic images. It also throws the light on religious tolerance and syncretism of the region. It is rare art specimen and another piece of this kind has not been discovered.

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